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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

48

198 SEP

CEREBUS
NO. 198 SEPTEMBER 1995

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MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)
Minds

MONTHLY
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DEAR STEVE GEPPI

Dear Steve Geppi:

As I mentioned in my letter to Bill Schanes, I'm going to try to avoid dealing with ancient history in this letter and concentrate, instead, on the here and now.

Let me start by saying that the overall retailer reaction to DC and Diamond's 'New Dynamics' has been positive: fewer 'hoops' to jump through and a greater recognition (than was evident in 'Marveluicide' — as I like to call it) of the need for lower minimums and incentives for retailers of all sizes. I did talk to one retailer at the Toronto 'New Dynamics' meeting, who has a very small store, who told me that there was no way he could order Marvel and DC comics from two different distributors and get enough of a discount to stay in business. I didn't know what to say to him. He had opened a store for the express purpose of supplying kids ten to twelve years of age with super-hero comics. He wasn't interested in carrying independents or graphic novels. 'I just wanted a store for the kids' — he must have said that three times in the course of our ten-minute conversation — 'I just wanted a store for the kids.' Most retailers weren't crazy about having to open another account so soon after they had to open one with Heroes World, but the consensus seemed to be that the 'New Dynamics' was better than they had hoped and much better than they had feared it would be.

Relative to Aardvark-Vanaheim, I am largely untroubled by the new relationship between DC and Diamond. A number of people, at the time of the Marvel/Heroes World acquisition, expressed the opinion that I would find it unacceptable to have the Marvel Entertainment Group make money from *Cerebus*, and that Ger and I would cut off Heroes World as a distributor. The only reason — the ONLY reason — we ever have or ever will cut off a distributor is for non-payment.

In examining Paul Levitz's leaked memo I detected within it more intra-corporate bravado than marketplace threat. It seems clear, reading between the lines, that Paul is feeling the precariousness of his situation in the Time-Warner hierarchy as the comic-book marketplace and DC Comics' overall sales volume continue to shrink. DC, viewed separately from its Warner Films corporate division, has not had — to say the least — a spectacular balance sheet in recent years. The DC/Diamond deal, in Paul's case, is probably a case of 'too little, too late' relative to his future at Time-Warner.

I know it must be difficult for you to understand my thinking in the context of the comic-book 'industry'. After all, there is no *Cerebus* movie or television cartoon, no *Cerebus* merchandise to speak of. It's hard for me to imagine how *Cerebus* and Dave Sim appear to you. The trade paperbacks represent a point or two on the Star System; the monthly comic regularly clocks in in the mid-two hundreds of the Top 100 list. Issue two hundred is fast approaching, which probably gives me a certain historical cachet in your world view. Apart from that, I imagine, from where you sit, I'm little more than a 'troublemaker' — someone with strong opinions who just can't seem to shut up about them.

It's certainly difficult for ME to arrive at a clear understanding of YOU, as well. From the public record and the few conversations we've had, I'd say that baseball is at least as important to you as comic books are — probably more important. I know you're a very civic-minded individual,

justifiably proud of the contributions you have made and continue to make to the life of the city of Baltimore and the state of Maryland. Your appreciation of comic books seems to have its largest emphasis in your nostalgic and sentimental appreciation of the Golden Age: your wealth giving you unprecedented access to the rarest and finest examples of the industry's artifacts. I'd heard that part of the DC deal included your acquisition of the Superman statue Jenette Kahn used to have in her office — a one-of-a-kind prototype from the late thirties or early forties. If true, I'm sure it has a place of honour in your home or office. *In a subsequent phone conversation Steve informed me that he had* not *acquired the prototype statue and told me the whole, fascinating history; that there were* two *statues and DC had traded one of them to a noted Superman collector for other rare Superman artifacts missing from their own archives. I digress.*

You are VERY well thought of in the comic-book field. This is no mean feat, considering the number of businesses you have acquired over the years. The comic-book marketplace, which experienced a near-meltdown level of panic at the prospect of Marvel Entertainment buying Heroes World, scarcely batted an eye when you took over Bud Plant, Overstreet Publications, Titan, Russ Cochran, etc., etc. The difference is that you are 'one of us' — a Comic-Book Person — and your credentials as such are indisputable. Even people with whom you have had honest disagreements over the years — myself included — do not consider you either as a personal enemy or an enemy of the comic-book medium or industry.

We — we, the REST of the Comic-Book People — don't know very much about you or Diamond. Did you pursue the deal with DC to strike back at Marvel and Ivan Snyder? Did you do it because you saw a chance to eliminate Capital City and take all of their retailers? Did you do it because Diamond has grown so large over the years that you foresaw irreconcilable cash-flow problems ahead?

We — we, the REST of the Comic-Book People — don't know, and it has led to something of a crisis of confidence in some quarters. DC's option to purchase part — and, ultimately, ALL — of Diamond comes as a shock. Your insistence that Diamond remains a completely independent entity — in light of the leaked Levitz memo — only compounds that shock.

Personally, I'm reasonably confident that things will take care of themselves. In a few years, Time-Warner will exercise (or not exercise) its option to acquire a minority share in Diamond. As Ted Kennedy might say, 'I'll drive off that bridge when I come to it.'

So long as that minority ownership follows the course you have set for Diamond, I see no cause for apprehension. If it doesn't, I have every confidence that Cold Cut and Big Picture Distribution aren't flukes or aberrations. Whatever business Time-Warner (in its severely limited wisdom) decides it can do without will doubtless find a more suitable distribution 'home' elsewhere.

What concerns me at this point is not that the comic-book market is getting smaller — lower sales figures which accurately reflect demand are, to me, a good thing. What concerns me is not the Marvel/Heroes World acquisition or the DC/Diamond deal. What DOES concern me is that the latter two courses of action were, self-evidently, acts born of desperation. They are radical departures from the corporate status quo, tacit acknowledgements that simple-minded expansion and proliferation of lines within lines and overexposure of franchise characters produce marginally larger revenues while drastically expanding overhead — the cost of goods sold; that increasing cover prices produces marginally larger revenues per unit sold while diminishing overall sales volume; metallic inks 'work' and then don't; card inserts 'work' and then don't — thus exhausting the inherently limited potential for gimmicks to revive moribund sales. What concerns me is: 'What stupid thing are they going to try next?'

Given that Heroes World has signed only three thousand of the five or six thousand stores which exist (one suspects that co-op buying — against Marvel's dictatorial edict — is taking place; raising the question, 'How much money is Perelman willing to spend rooting out and cutting off the offenders?' and the more amusing question, 'How many retailers will he be left with once he's "executed" a majority of his marketplace?' Assuming that Diamond has a similar track record with the DC exclusive and is facing the same interesting questions — does Diamond or DC pay for the Anti-Co-Op Death Squads? being just one of many) AND given that this whole 'smoke-and-mirrors, dog-and-pony' show is only accelerating the already rapid decline of Marvel and DC as comic-book companies — or, more significantly, as comic-book DIVISIONS of Disney Wannabe Corporations — the largest possible question is: 'What incredibly stupid thing are Marvel and DC going to try next when THIS doesn't work?'

This concerns me and — given that the limited range of options available to them are more likely to affect your livelihood than mine — I hope it concerns you as well.

In the last five years, every effort they have made to slow their decline as comic-book DIVISIONS has only accelerated it. Each move intended to weaken their competition has only strengthened it, each move to expand the 'pie' has only made it smaller.

This really is the bottom line.

In your capacity as a co-owner of the Baltimore Orioles you are aware that, in order to produce a winning ball club, you have to pay for the talent necessary. This applies to the comic-book field as well; you need talented writers and artists to produce a 'winning' company — and this is where Marvel and DC find themselves unable to compete.

Of course they have their tokenism — Neil Gaiman and *Sandman*, Chris Claremont with *Sovereign Seven*, John Romita and the Kubert brothers with their hefty Marvel contracts. This is comparable to you paying Cal Ripken three million dollars a year and everyone else on the team fifty or a hundred thousand with the idea that they will play their hearts out on the off-hand chance that they might — MIGHT — someday be paid as well as Mr. Ripken. It wouldn't work in baseball, as I'm sure you'll agree, and it shows no sign of working in the comic-book field.

There is a schism which has developed in the comic-

book field which is largely centered on the creators and their natural preference for creator-ownership and control, over the dubious distinction of being known as 'the' *Spider-Man* artist or 'the' *Batman* writer (Peter David being the exception that proves the rule).

Let me return to your nostalgic affection for the Golden Age and provide you with a contrast between yourself and myself that will perhaps better illustrate the schism I'm discussing here.

I used to collect Golden Age DCs — specifically pre-Pearl Harbor super-hero comics. I sold them a few years back. The largest reason for doing so was my recognition of how quickly the characters became 'corporatized' (to coin a word). The first dozen issues of *Action Comics*, *Detective Comics* 27 through (say) 43, reflected the raw enthusiasm of the creators — they were written and drawn by kids obviously enamoured of the works of Alex Raymond, Milt Caniff, Hal Foster and others. Those comic books were little more than King Features Syndicate fanzines with all the youthful enthusiasm and energy that implied. In very, very short order, the insatiable demand for comics 'product' took its toll on that enthusiasm and energy. You can see Siegel and Shuster and Bob Kane and their peers being edged from the center of the action: Superman and Batman as trademarked corporate icons replacing their previous incarnations as the creations of individuals, of human beings.

Once a thing is seen, it can't be UNseen.

There was a sense of loss on my part at this realisation, to be sure. The fourteen-year-old boy I had been — who had burned with the temptation of the damned to own the first seven issues of *Batman* — was superseded by the artist and writer I had become, who saw in those Golden Age 'treasures' the onset of the malaise, the cancer, which has dogged our medium from that day to this. I had to make a choice of which aspect of myself was more important. And so I made that choice.

You and I disagree that there is a choice to be made between the sentimental and nostalgic affection for the past and the morally responsible course of deploring work-made-for-hire; I accept that there is no way to change what has been, but I believe that there IS a necessity to end an exploitive system and start over on a clean page in our collective notebooks.

There is a great deal to recommend honouring the creative pioneers in our field, acknowledging their contributions to our history at conventions, at trade shows, in our magazines and in our books (I might even add, parenthetically, that many of these veterans are eager to contribute creatively and would find employment a far more welcome accolade than the lip-service tribute to historical contributions paid by many in the industry). There is a great deal to recommend the preservation and display of the artifacts of our collective past, as you have done with outstanding results with the Diamond Galleries. I also think there is a persuasive argument to be made that improving the working and living conditions of comic-book creators — of the profession itself — is at least as important as the preservation of their work. I think it is reprehensible and immoral (albeit legal) for a corporation of any size to own and control an individual's creativity; I think it is reprehensible for a creation to be continually modified and corrupted in directions which violate the original sensibility which informed it and gave it life. I acknowledge that there is nothing to be done in this area with those creators and creations who have been contractually separated from each other. There is, however, a growing awareness in the creative community that we have arrived at a point, long overdue, where we have to put self-interest first or suffer the historical consequences of trusting companies and their representatives. The fact that it was a centerpiece of Jack Kirby's career and a point of pride for him that, wherever possible, he worked only on characters he himself had created or co-created and that so many creators see themselves as honoring his memory by working on those characters (and see no inherent immorality in doing so) is just something we have to live with, I suppose. It is my hope that those of us who see this as a basic issue of morality vs. immorality can continue to be as vocal as possible on the subject and that succeeding generations of creators will choose Kirby's viewpoint over that of the parasites who have succeeded him in the mainstream work-made-for-hire context.

I've strayed a bit from the business context of this letter, so let me return to it now, as well as a further development of the baseball analogy:

The term 'partnership' is widely used in distribution circles. I think the term is a more apt characterization of the relationship between distributors and creators than it is of distributors and companies. In the decade-plus that Diamond has been distributing *Cerebus* and the five years or so that you have been distributing the *Cerebus* trade paperbacks, both Diamond and Aardvark-Vanaheim have continued to profit from work that I did nearly twenty years ago. *Cerebus* is a reliable source of business — unlike the vast majority of Marvel and DC books which represent a one-time profitability for yourselves and (more often than not) an inventory liability for the stores you serve. I think the question becomes 'with whom are we partners?' and, further, 'to what end?' Whether you're aware of it or not, you were partners with Todd McFarlane on *Spider-Man*, Rob Liefeld on *X-Men*, Rick Veitch on *Swamp Thing*. What might have been long-term profitability in each of these cases became short-term — in Rick Veitch's case, through no fault of yours or his, you ended up with a flawed product — a long story without an ending completely unsuitable for ongoing sales in graphic-novel form for reasons known only to Jenette Kahn.

Companies are bad partners for you.

As constituted, it is as if you signed Jamie Moyer to the Baltimore Orioles and then found that his manager/agent kept him up every night before a game throwing fastballs for five hours, berating him as incompetent, forcing him to throw the same split-fingered fastball, the same knuckleball, the same change-up and the same slider — in the same combination — as all of that manager/agent's pitcher/clients. The publishers and editors have exactly that much destructive control in the field. To extend the analogy, it's as if Diamond is doing business with just such manager/agents, accepting the

fact that when the pitcher is worn out and used up, it is his own fault — whereupon you turn to the same manager/agent to develop the NEXT hot pitching prospect.

Writing and drawing comic books for a living is very much like being a baseball player. Like them, we have no idea why one day we can go 4-4 at the plate and the next day go 0-5. Like them, the more successful of us learn to always look forward. There's nothing we can do about a bad game except try to forget about it and concentrate on the next one.

The difference between a self-publisher and a freelancer (to extend the analogy even further) is that when a self-publisher hits a solid shot up the middle for a base hit, that's it. It's on the scoresheet. The freelancer has to take his solid shot up the middle to his or her editor, who then, by insisting on changes to the art, story or both, attempts to modify the single into a double or a triple — whereupon it usually turns into an infield dribbler for an easy out at first.

The post-1986 corporate comics market can best be described as a nearly unimaginably large number of manager/agents expending the greatest amount of time, energy and money in attempting to make their clients duplicate Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* feat of four home runs in one game or Alan Moore's twelve-RBI performance on *Watchmen*.

It doesn't work that way — not in baseball and not in comics. It just doesn't. It just can't. It never will.

This intrusion of company bureaucrats in the relationship between creators and distributors is critical to understanding where the comic-book market is today and where it is going. If the 'marquee names' in comics were the only ones to generate profit for Diamond, the market would be a good deal smaller than it is and it would shrink further and faster than it is going to. If the large drop-off of orders from issue one to issue two and issue three were the only ordering dynamic at work in the market, the Marvel/DC solution (more number ones, more mini-series) would be universally applied and the rot infesting the field would be a terminal malignancy. Fortunately, such is not the case.

Self-publishers, small-press creators and the better stores have come to realise that — when it comes to quality — the direct market is a very long-term challenge. Their careers are measured in years, if not decades. Self-publishers and small-press creators accept the fact that orders on a first issue of 5,000 copies will drop to 3,000 on the second issue, 2,000 on the third. But they have learned to dig in their heels, to focus on improving their skills, and they have confidence that somewhere up ahead they will prevail, collectively, against the poison and cynicism of the corporate control of our medium. It's really only a matter of time.

With innovations like the Diamond Reorder Universe system and young and aggressive alternative-comics distributors emerging to fulfill the long-term demand for small-press back issues, the distribution aspect of the comics market is beginning to re-plot its course for the future, reflecting the changes in retailer and consumer needs and requirements.

The self-publishing 'safety net' program outlined in the previous issue (which I have enclosed for you) is, I hope you'll agree, another link in the chain of innovations which will prepare the entire direct market to move forward into a solid, more certain future.

Since I reached an 'agreement in principle' with John and Milton on such a program, discussions with retailers and self-publishers about the 'nuts and bolts' raised some unforeseen problems and questions:

In assigning payment for a purchase order directly to a printer, the first question raised is: 'What happens if the orders for a solicited trade paperback are insufficient to pay the printing bill for a minimum number of trade paperbacks?' As we're all aware, initial orders represent a fraction — the tip of the iceberg — of the potential long-term sales on a trade paperback. Particularly in the case of a small-press trade and particularly in uncertain times in the marketplace, retailers are going to order a minimal number of copies initially, counting on Hyperlink and the reorder system to meet long-term demand. If the initial solicitation through Capital garners orders of five to six hundred dollars wholesale and the minimum printing bill is eight hundred or a thousand dollars, there still exists the problem for the self-publisher of having to make up the shortfall in the cash required. Obviously it would be a great help if Diamond would also agree to assign payment to the printer for those self-publishers who find themselves in this situation — where both Capital and Diamond assigning payment would make the difference between a trade paperback becoming a reality and remaining an impossibility.

My conversation with Michael Cohen, the *Strange Attractors* artist and co-publisher, gave me a clearer picture of the difficulties ahead in developing a successful program:

'Essentially, Capital has agreed to assign payment for an invoice to the printer for a trade paperback reprinting the first four issues of a...'

'First EIGHT issues,' Michael interjected.

I conceded the point (and, to be fair, 'The Situation Room' hadn't yet seen print at the time of our conversation), but my mind was racing ahead, anticipating the problem implied by insisting on an eight-issue instead of a four-issue collection: a) the printing bill would be higher, b) the cover price would have to be higher, c) initial orders would be lower. Calculated together, these three elements increase the likelihood that Capital City's initial orders alone would be insufficient to cover the printing bill. In this case I think it would be helpful to have Diamond agree to a similar 'assignment of payment' program so that a self-publisher, finding him or herself in this situation, would have the option of a joint assignment of payment to cover a printing bill for his or her first trade paperback.

Looking further ahead, the next implied question is: 'If both Diamond and Capital, in agreeing to assign payment, were able to underwrite the cost of the first printing of a trade paperback, how would the self-publisher be able to do a second printing?' With all payments for the initial orders going to the printer and the profit on the sales of the remaining inventory stretched out over weeks or months, where would the self-publisher get the cash to produce another printing?

What I am attempting to do is to find some workable solution to a problem which comes down to cash flow. The commonest question in the comic-book market as regards a new self-published title past its second or third issue with good 'word of mouth' is: 'When is the trade paperback collection coming out?' It could reasonably be suggested that the Cartoon Books approach to self-publishing — endlessly reprinting the single issues while also offering trade paperback collections — has a solid rate of success. At the same time, a lot of self-published books experience demand which, while strong, falls well short of '*Bone* numbers' and most self-publishers have to plan their publishing programs without the benefit of '*Bone*-sized cash flow'. A case in point: having exhausted her limited resources getting the first *Wandering Star* trade paperback in print and in maintaining her supply of subsequent printings of back issues, Teri S. Wood (from what I've heard) finds herself unable to drum up enough cash to print her current issue — even though it has been drawn and written for a couple of months or more. I'm not sure what the answer is (and I'm certainly eager to hear if anyone has any ideas on the subject), but it seems unfortunate to me that for self-published books with genuine long-term demand, no system exists as yet to smooth over cash-flow transition periods, thus tending to leave the self-publisher without revenue and the market without an adequate supply of his or her books. This is particularly troubling when it occurs just at the point that market interest is reaching a 'breakthrough' point (I don't think many would dispute that Teri's *Wandering Star* is in that category).

I'm not unmindful of the fact that we all want to avoid any possibility of a 'self-publishing welfare state'. The idea is to ease transitions of a book that is already successful, not to finance those who are unable to 'make the grade' in a free marketplace.

I'd like to find a system that 'works' with the fewest modifications of self-publishing autonomy and decision-making and a minimal use of distributor resources in key areas to guarantee a supply line of self-published comics and trade paperbacks to meet proven market demands.

I would suspect the process can be streamlined:

a) self-publisher is responsible for printing costs on first four issues, including any reprintings up to the fourth issue

b) with publication of the fifth issue, self-publisher solicits for a trade paperback reprinting the first four issues — initial orders to determine if assignment of payment to the printer is required from Capital or Diamond or both — allowing back issues to go out of print at that point

c) self-publisher keeps first issue or 'encapsulation/ Our Story Thus Far' comic in print at all times to provide distributors and retailers with a low-cost introductory publication for new readers

d) self-publisher notifies distributors when supplies of his or her trade paperback are getting low. Distributors agree to solicit second printing on the same basis as the first — Capital and/or Diamond agreeing to assign payment to the printer

To sum up:

1. What is required by the market is innovative, readable comics material: titles which are under the control of their individual creators or team of creators.
2. Marvel and DC are unwilling and/or unable to compensate their creators adequately (with token exceptions) and refuse to allow them creative control (with token exceptions).
3. The inescapable implication of point 2 is that Marvel and DC are unable to publish comic books with long-term market growth and must rely on fads and gimmicks to slow their decline. They are failing at this.
4. Marvel Entertainment Group and Time-Warner, having as their corporate ambition a desire to be as 'Disney-like' as possible, can be expected to imitate Disney in their approach to the comic-book field (i.e., maintaining a superficial presence in the marketplace with their largest emphasis and resources devoted to supermarkets, mainstream bookstores, and comic books as children's entertainment and as inexpensive forums to protect their trademarks).
5. Given a choice between creator-ownership and control of their own creativity or being a pair of 'hired hands', the vast majority of creators have and will continue to choose the former.
6. Through a low-cost, low-maintenance program of providing a safety net for self-publishers with positive market response, Diamond can be instrumental in assisting creators to develop their books into long-term profit centers for Diamond Comic Distributors and the direct market in general.

I realise this is a very long letter, but I'm sure you can understand that I had a lot of territory to cover. As simple as I am trying to make the self-publisher safety net assistance program, already the needs and requirements of the creative, retail and distribution communities have dictated the need for modification. I'm sure this will continue to be the case for some time — particularly after this sees print and I begin to get response and suggestions from those directly affected (which is damn near everyone).

I do hope, by the end of October, to be contacting self-publishers most in need of assistance in bridging the gap between regular periodical publication and the first trade paperback (those interested, anyway; a number of self-publishers like Batton Lash, Bill Tucci, Don Simpson and others have already made the 'jump' on their own). At that time I would be very pleased if Diamond were interested in such a program as I have outlined here as a natural 'next step' in your successive efforts to assist the self-publisher with 'Under the Reading Lamp', TRU, 'Celebrate Diversity', 'The Small-Press Sampler' and others.

As with a baseball team, it's not enough to just draft the right talent, to publicize the brighter prospects and then sign their paychecks every week. That works with some, but others need a little more assistance to fulfill the potential that attracted your interest in the first place.

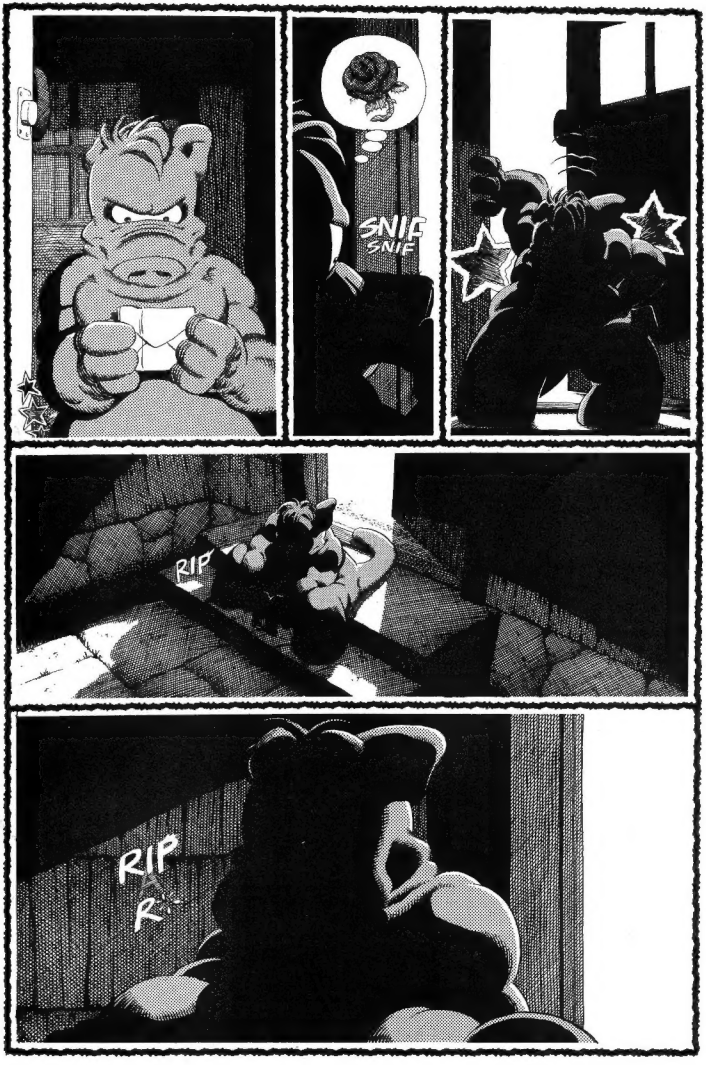
Put 'em in, coach. They're ready to play.

Take care, Steve. I'll talk to you soon.

Sincerely,

Dave Sim
Aardvark-Vanaheim Inc.

WE HAD A DEAL.
'JAKA IS HAPPY TO STAY WITH CEREBUS...'
'... NO MATTER WHAT.'
YES. I KNOW
JUST READ THE LETTER


SNIP
SNIP
RIP
RIP

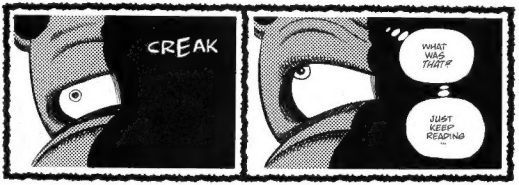
RIP RIP RIP

happy I am to be with you, you

...u always get the strangest look in your eyes and change the subject -- but it's true! Being with you is the only

thing that makes me happy. I watch you all the time. I know all of your moods by sight. I knew sdmething had changed when you started staring out the windows at the house next door. What a pair we would have seemed if anyone had walked in on us! You, there, staring at the house next door and me, here, staring at you. Of course, I never once had to wonder what was on your mind -- the look on your face told me all I needed to know -- I

Ethel
Of Co



think the look on your face told me all I needed to know. I know that look so well -- after all, you used to look at me that way. I

finally met Joanne

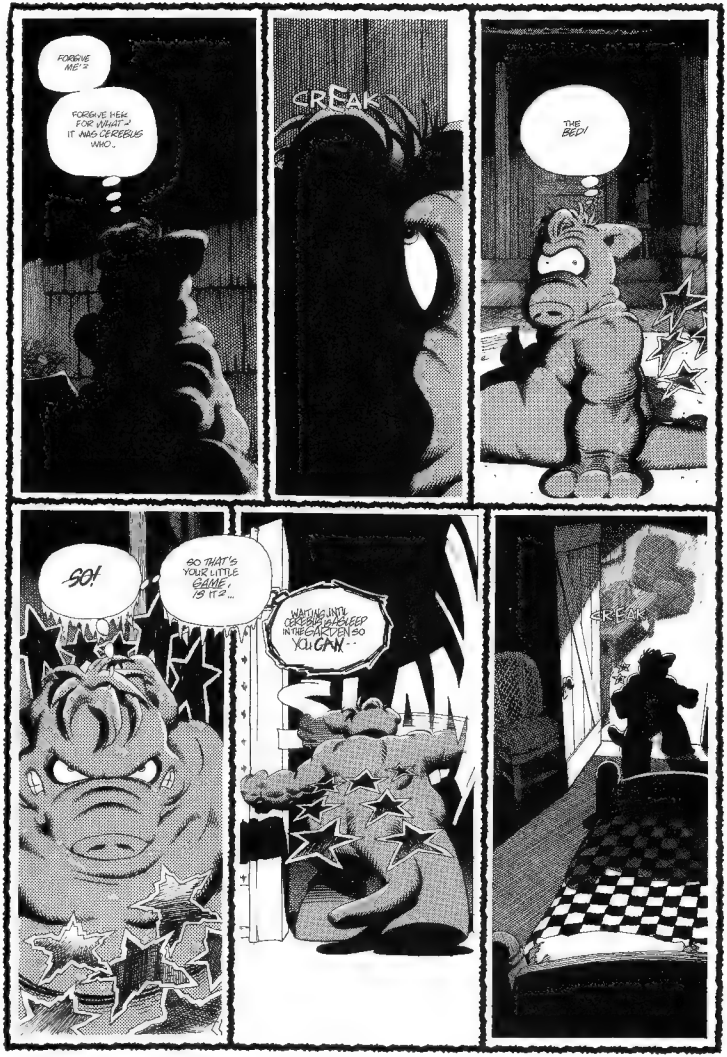
-- we both happened to be outside and I thought I would introduce myself.

I've never seen such a look of love mingled with fear on a girl's face before. "It's just talking," she said. "We just talk." And then she cringed as if she expected to be hit. I didn't know wh

say. It really didn't matter to me whe ou talked or kissed or Made love every n our bed. Odd, since when I was with e, I know you hate for me to mention him.) erbial Green-Eyed Monster. Your happiness is the only thing that's important to me. I wanted to tell her that.

When she saw I wasn't going to hit her, that look of fear and love turned to one of anger and hate and she said,

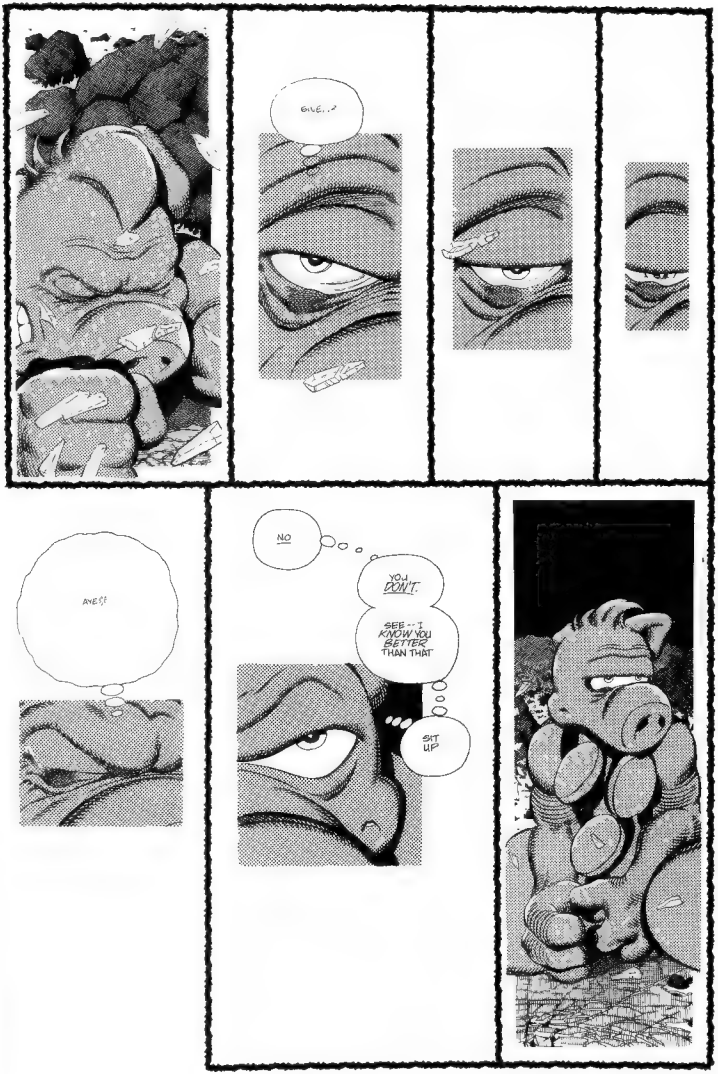
and then I realised, the CREAK watched you watching her, house
that my happiness had blinded me to the fact that your happiness
now lies elsewhere – with Joanne.
I can't leave you.
I can't begin to think of a life with someone else or even
somewhere else. My only happiness is by your side.
I love you, Cupidus, my darling – Forever and forever.
I never imagined I could be so happy as I've been these
last two years
Forgive me,
Jaka
'FORGIVE ME'...
'JAKA'

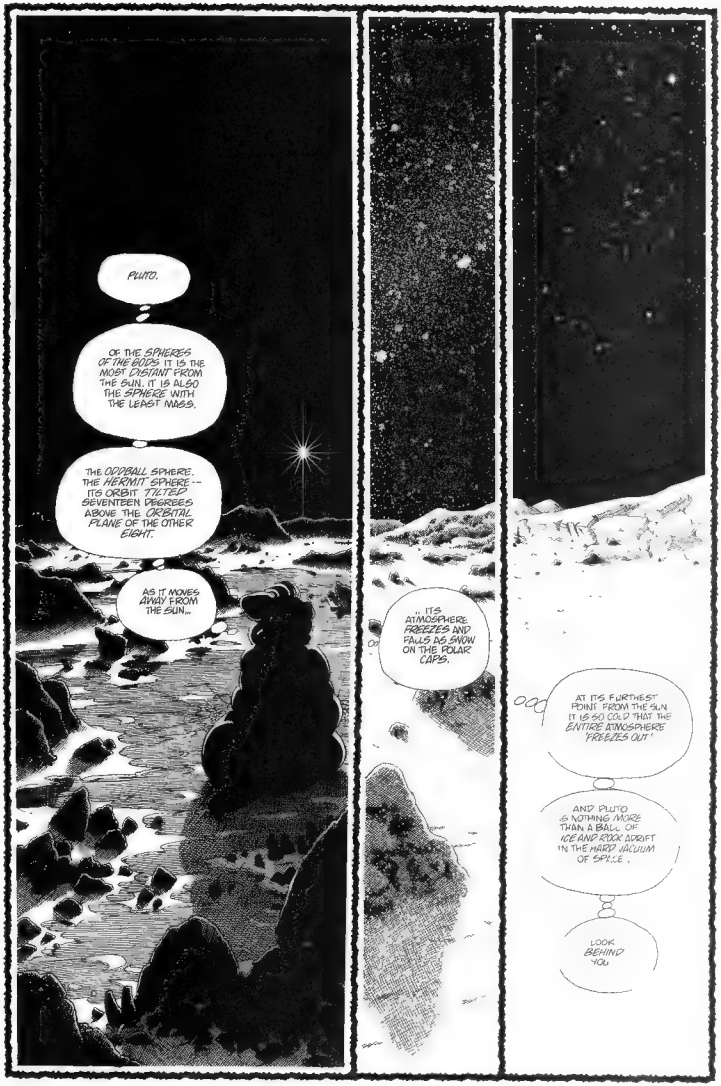

FORGIVE ME?
FORGIVE HER FOR WHAT? IT WAS CERBERUS WHO...
CREAK
THE BED!
SO!
SO THAT'S YOUR LITTLE GAME, IS IT?...
WAITING UNTIL EVERYBODY'S ASLEEP IN THE GARDEN SO YOU CAN...
SLAM
CREAK

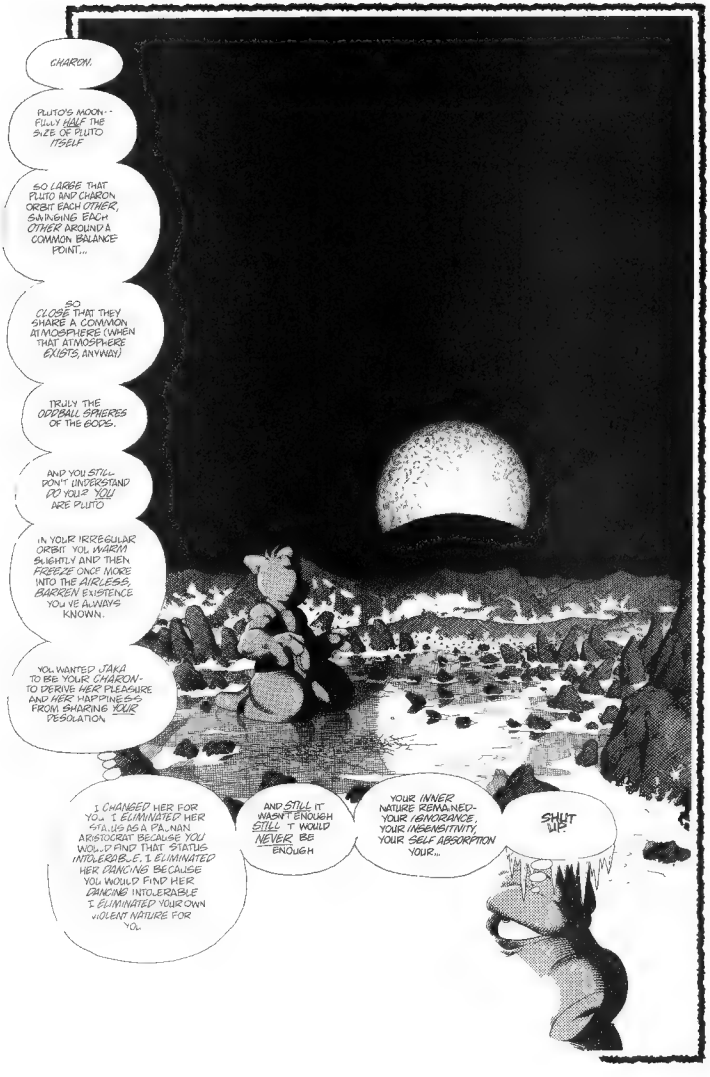
CREAK
SLAM

CREAK
NOOO

CREAK
NOOO


GIVE...?
AYE?!
NO
YOU DON'T.
SEE -- I KNOW YOU BETTER THAN THAT
SIT UP


PLUTO.
OF THE SPHERES OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM IT IS THE MOST DISTANT FROM THE SUN. IT IS ALSO THE SPHERE WITH THE LEAST MASS.
THE ODDBALL SPHERE. THE HERMIT SPHERE -- ITS ORBIT TILTED SEVENTEEN DEGREES ABOVE THE ORBITAL PLANE OF THE OTHER EIGHT.
AS IT MOVES AWAY FROM THE SUN...
... ITS ATMOSPHERE FREEZES AND FALLS AS SNOW ON THE POLAR CAPS.
AT ITS FURTHEST POINT FROM THE SUN IT IS SO COLD THAT THE ENTIRE ATMOSPHERE 'FREEZES OUT'
AND PLUTO IS NOTHING MORE THAN A BALL OF ICE AND ROCK ADRIFT IN THE HARD VACUUM OF SPACE.
LOOK BEHIND YOU


CHARON.
PLUTO'S MOON-- FULLY HALF THE SIZE OF PLUTO ITSELF
SO LARGE THAT PLUTO AND CHARON ORBIT EACH OTHER, SWINGING EACH OTHER AROUND A COMMON BALANCE POINT...
SO CLOSE THAT THEY SHARE A COMMON ATMOSPHERE (WHEN THAT ATMOSPHERE EXISTS, ANYWAY)
TRULY THE ODDBALL SPHERES OF THE GODS.
AND YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND DO YOU? YOU ARE PLUTO
IN YOUR IRREGULAR ORBIT YOU WARM SLIGHTLY AND THEN FREEZE ONCE MORE INTO THE AIRLESS, BARREN EXISTENCE YOU'VE ALWAYS KNOWN.
YOU WANTED ZAKA TO BE YOUR CHARON-- TO DERIVE HER PLEASURE AND HER HAPPINESS FROM SHARING YOUR DESOLATION.
I CHANGED HER FOR YOU. I ELIMINATED HER STALKS AS A PA'MAN ARISTOCRAT BECAUSE YOU WOULD FIND THAT STATUS INTOLERABLE. I ELIMINATED HER DANCING BECAUSE YOU WOULD FIND HER DANCING INTOLERABLE I ELIMINATED YOUR OWN VIOLENT NATURE FOR YOU.
AND STILL IT WASN'T ENOUGH STILL I WOULD NEVER BE ENOUGH
YOUR INNER NATURE REMAINED-- YOUR IGNORANCE, YOUR INSENSITIVITY, YOUR SELF ABSORPTION YOUR...
SHUT UP!

YOU
SHUT UP
CRAK
YOU
SHUT UP AND
YOU FUCKING LISTEN
ONCE
FUCKING
LIFE
YOU WOUNDED JAKA--
WOUNDED HER MORTALLY
SO SHE FELT SHE HAD NO
RECOURSE BUT
TO TAKE HER OWN
LIFE!
YOU WOUNDED
JOANNE THE
SAME WAY!
AND WHO DO
YOU THINK
IS TO BLAME?
I KNOW WHO YOU
THINK IS TO BLAME--
YOU BLAME JAKA
FOR YOUR INFIDELITY
AND JOANNE
FOR JAKA'S
SUICIDE!

HAVEN'T BEEN HIT ***THAT*** HARD IN A ***LONG*** TIME, HAVE YOU?

NAY

WELL, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF *TIME*... AND I'M RUNNING OUT OF WAYS TO 'WAKE YOU UP'.

SEE, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO SAY, 'I GIVE'...

VERY FRUSTRATING FOR A CREATOR TO *ENGINEER* A CIRCUMSTANCE, THINKING 'AH - THIS WILL DO THE TRICK... ***NOW*** HE'LL UNDERSTAND.'

I GO TO ALL THAT TROUBLE ONLY TO REALISE THAT YOU HAVEN'T LEARNED A *THING*. YOU '*GIVE*' BECAUSE YOU'VE DECIDED ***I'M*** AGAINST YOU, ***TARIM*** IS AGAINST YOU - - THE ***WORLD*** IS AGAINST YOU.

I SCARED YOU, JUST NOW, BY HITTING YOU VERY HARD - AND ***THEN*** I SCARED YOU SOME MORE BY YELLING AT YOU. THE PROBLEM WITH *FEAR* GENERATED BY HITTING AND YELLING IS THAT IT ... WEARS OFF

OF COURSE (*TEMPORARILY ANYWAY*) YOU ARE IN A STATE OF *HEIGHTENED AWARENESS*... THIS SUDDEN SWITCH, ON MY PART, FROM YELLING TO A DISPASSIONATE AND REASONED TONE - *FAR* FROM REASSURING YOU - IS FEEDING YOUR ANXIETY, AS WELL IT SHOULD

SO '*AWARE*' ARE YOU, THAT A KIND OF *TELEPATHY* EXISTS BETWEEN US. '*CEREBUS IS REALLY IN FOR IT NOW...*' INDEED YOU ARE.

'*CEREBUS CAN'T GET OUT OF THIS ONE.*' INDEED, YOU CAN'T

'*HE KNOWS CEREBUS IS SQUEAMISH ABOUT EYES*' INDEED I DO.

'*CEREBUS CAN'T CLOSE HIS RIGHT EYE*' INDEED, YOU CAN'T.

AND NOW, YOUR STATE OF AWARENESS IS HEIGHTENED EVEN FURTHER, ISN'T IT?

WE HAVE REACHED A POINT OF THREE-WAY CONVERGENCE. THERE IS A BUMP ON THE UNDERLID OF YOUR RIGHT EYE. RED AND SWOLLEN AND PAINFUL.

CONSIDER THE ENTIRETY OF YOUR PHYSICAL FORM TO BE YOUR CREATOR--ME. CONSIDER THE BUMP TO BE YOU.

YOU ARE A PAINFUL RED SWELLING VERY NEAR TO YOUR CREATOR'S MOST HIGHLY-DEVELOPED ORGAN OF PERCEPTION.

THE PRESSURE IS BUILDING FROM WITHIN, GROWING BY THE MOMENT. SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE DONE

AND THAT BRINGS US TO THE THIRD PART OF THE CONVERGENCE: "YOU"..... "ME"

AND A REMARKABLE--LARGELY FORGOTTEN AND LARGELY UNFORGETTABLE--QUIRK IN THE HISTORY OF THE MEDIUM WITHIN WHICH YOU EXIST TO WIT

THE 'INJURY-TO-EYE' MOTIF

motif (mō·tēf′)

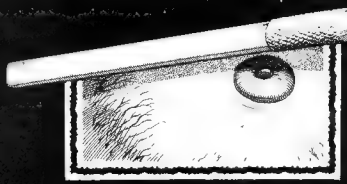
also motive (mō·tĭv′, mō·tĕv′)

n. 1a) The underlying theme or main element in a literary or artistic work b) A dominant theme 2. A significant phrase in a musical composition 3. A repeated figure or design in architecture or decoration

To describe 'injury to eye' as a 'motif' seems oxymoronic. 'An underlying theme or main element...'? It occurred infrequently in 'crime' and 'horror' comics of the fifties: a panel or two functioning as an archetype of extreme brutality, establishing its perpetrator as an individual devoid of the basics of human empathy. The actual 'theme' of such stories would be described more accurately as 'crime does not pay' or 'bad people come to a bad end'. The supplementary definition — 'a dominant theme' — MIGHT apply if one contemplates the **EFFECT** of such depictions on the reader/viewer. The shocked, new awareness created by the anticipation of 'injury to eye' imbues the panel or panel sequence with a 'dominance' which exceeds (dramatically) the space it occupies in the story's context. 'A significant phrase in a musical composition': on the surface this seems completely at odds with a soundless medium of expression. But, again, in contemplating the **EFFECT** upon the reader, the internalized, nearly musical coupling of words and pictures, suddenly conjoined (at an individual level of perception) by a piercing, keening 'gore shriek' (if you will) gives this definition a greater applicability than might be most commonly supposed. How extensive will the injury be? How detailed will the illustration be and at what proximity will it be viewed? The individual reader/viewer's imagination, squeamishness and reluctant anticipation define the boundaries of the 'phrase' and its 'significance'. We will leave discussion of the third definition for the aftermath of this **PARTICULAR** 'injury to eye'...

scalpel

(skal'·pəl) *n.* A small pointed knife with a very sharp thin blade used in dissection and in surgery [L *scalpellum* dim. of *scalprum* knife < *scalpere* to cut]



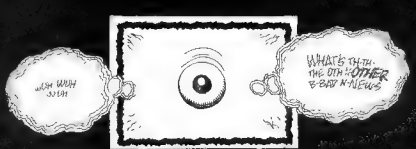
And now your awareness is heightened even further. Actually, the scalpel comes later in the proceedings. If it's any consolation to you, I went through this myself — twice. The first time, the bump was on my upper lid and (being, like yourself, a slow learner) I didn't get the point (pardon the pun). The second time, there was a bump on my upper AND lower lid. With the LOWER lid, I got the point.

The point: It is difficult for a creator to engineer a suitable repercussion for the pain which his unfeeling creation has inflicted upon those who feel very deeply and emotionally (please note the accuracy of the term 'repercussion': the dynamic at work is one of 'cause and effect', not 'punishment').

'Let me show you what you have done unto others,' the creator implies. 'Let me show you all at once.'

So! I have bad news and good news and bad news for you. The FIRST bit of bad news is that the scalpel will — very slowly — cut vertically and horizontally through the bump so the blood and pus can be drained from it, the wound irrigated and cleansed.

The GOOD news is that you won't feel a thing when it happens. The entire area will be numb — completely insensitive to any pain or sensation whatsoever.



Ah! You see? You're finally paying attention. Isn't heightened awareness grand?
The OTHER bad news (my obnoxious little gray creation) is the

syringe

(sir′inj , si·rinj) *n.*
an instrument (as for the injection of medicine) that consists of a hollow barrel fitted with a plunger and a hollow needle [Gk. *syring*, *syrinx* panpipe, tube]

There are two other supplementary definitions I won't bore you with. The syringe contains an anaesthetic —a solution which will deaden the nerve endings in the afflicted area, completely neutralizing their ability to conduct impulses of pain perception to your brain. The only way to flood the afflicted area with anaesthetic is by means of a hypodermic injection. And the only way to inject it there (and this is OTHER bad news) is through the hollow center of the needle, which must first PIERCE the SOFT FLESH of the underlid.

The second time I went through this, —knowing what was coming— there was a song fragment going through my head before, during and after.

It was the part that goes...

OKAY
OKAY
OKAY
IT'S JUST A LITTLE
PIN PRICK
THERE'LL BE NO MORE

KITCHENER, ONTARIO:

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ALL TABLES SOLD OUT

DECEMBER 3, 1995
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Well, it was so much fun last time, let's do it again, eh?

Dear Dave,

Well, I am cheered to see that as of #193 you're still getting input on the infamous One Eight Six in the lettercol; possibly by the time you get this you'll still be receiving bouquets and brickbats like this one (actually, this letter is a little of both). For what it's worth (and, Dave, I expect a letter this long to get at least a profound "Hmm. That's interesting"), I may also be able to append some remarks about the reception the One Eight Six got from You Know Where, if by the time I finish typing this thing (in intermittent spurts, that is) I can find a furshlugginer copy of the damn thing (they would put it in the Frazetta issue, y'know?). Stay tuned, same Aardvark-time...

Make no mistake: as a representation of reality, I disagree with much of what is said in *Reads* of One Eight Six. But as a philosophical rant from a creator sounding out his own preferences and prochvities, it's great, and I'm tempted to invoke Pound and Lawrence in comparison, if only because such presumption might induce apoplexy in certain elitist critics. Your essay is no model of evenhandedness, but it is, as you say, "brutally" honest, which directness I sometimes prefer to the patina of objectivity being used to cover up outright bias. I'll begin with the negativities; if nothing else, you can use them as ammunition against the view Expressed by Some that Nobody Disses Dave on His Own Turf –

(1) "Male Light" vs. "Merged Permanence." Hmm. Not the clearest set of paired opposites ever conceived, Dave. "Light" vs. "Voids" is better, but when you invoke them I keep getting the feeling Apollo and Dionysus ought to be getting royalty rights. Guess you, the writer, have got to go with what says it best to you; but I, the reader, can only wish for something a little smoother. The alchemical *solve et coagula* comes to mind, too: after all, your Male Light *solves* the problems set by reason, while the Female void just kinda sits there and coagulates — **(*Solve et coagula* is a bit of a stretch in the context I intended — perhaps a distant cousin or 'variation on a theme'? In any discussion of opposites I think individuals reveal much about themselves in what they consider something 'a little smoother' — i.e., 'Business vs. Art' [*The Comics Journal*'s underpinning that these represent 'wrong interest' and 'right interest' for the True Artiste] and 'Companies vs. Art' [self-publishing].)**

(2) Is "Merged Permanence" purely a female phenomenon? Is it not just as evident in both sexes of our pongid predecessors, when the male simians flee the company of the females and the young to join the fraternities of hunting-and-foraging parties? (I see in this activity the foretaste of a Chayefsky play: "Whadda you wanna do tonight, Cheetah?" "I dunno, Bonzo; whadda *you* wanna do?") "The wife and kids" are not the sole motivation which causes males to surrender their individual identities; the Dionysian tyranny of the group can take over anywhere: Paglia attests to it (or to her impressions of it) in assorted gay and lesbian groups

(Side note: I note one of your correspondents referred to "Camille Pagliacci." While this is funny — and not inappropriate to her public persona — I'll be

damned if I could figure out what it had to do with what he was saying.) **(I agree with Camille Paglia more often than I disagree — bedfellows make strange politics, I've decided. I thought 'Camille Pagliacci' was funny as hell; who cares if it applied to what the guy was saying?**

I suppose it depends on whether you take husbands and fathers at their word that they surrender their individual identities to corporations and the military and whatnot for the larger good of 'the wife and kids' or if that's just the cover story for getting off on reprehensible behaviours [rape, pillage, greed]. Or, in the context of the comic-book field, for creators doing lucrative work instead of the 'right thing' for their creativity because they have 'a wife and kids to support'. Whether they just value material possessions over creative integrity or they really are noble providers, the net effect is the same and I [for one] would like to see a lot less of it, whatever the 'real' motivation is.)

(3) You champion "Male Light," a.k.a. Reason, as against the "Female Void," and you claim that "Light Does Not Breed." If by that metaphor you refer to the Light of Physics, that stuff Clerk Maxwell used to study, then no, it doesn't breed. But it doesn't create great civilized societies either, being merely an energetic effluvium incapable of communication. (It does, however, make possible what we know as Life, thanks to certain Earthly Voids [that is, Plants] which can absorb and transform that energy.) If you're talking "Philosophical Light," as in the Light of Great Minds, then I'm not so certain that doesn't breed: Plato begat Aristotle, Hegel begat Marx, and so on. That the "offspring" doesn't always take after the "parent" is nothing new.

I guess I'm not too surprised that you enshrine Reason; I see you, Dave, as a Cynic in the tradition of Diogenes, using the magazine *Cerebus* as your lantern in a search for honesty/truth/rationality/whatever. Cynics always believe that Reason is what this sloppy, crappy world most needs — as against a Romantic, who finds the world too ordered, and so enshrines Imagination instead. The problem with enshrining Reason is that the process by which Reason proceeds — i.e., Logic — always depends on some more or less arbitrary proposition, which is taken as "true" or "mostly true." Such propositions inescapably have their roots in both the Apollonian/reasoning and Dionysian/emotional parts of the proposition-maker's mind; freedom from emotion's hold is never possible. If Gary Groth were to state, "Dave Sim is a less important figure to comics than Robert Crumb," I do not think you will deny that he could come up with any number of closely reasoned, "forensic" arguments to support that claim. I could, in my turn, argue the opposite proposition, but neither of us would have proved anything beyond how intricately we justify our emotional biases. "All stories are true," if you will. **(Well, yes, exactly. I want to tell my story. To return to point 1's answer, *The Comics Journal* has a viewpoint, I have a viewpoint. One of us isn't going to 'win' and the other 'lose'. Drew Hayes went to Sirius. Eddie Campbell started self-publishing. There are creators who are firmly in one 'camp' or the other, and there are creators who 'switch sides'. The thing that seems to trouble everyone is that they want some compromise struck between the two sides so we can be 'one big happy comic-book family'. No way, no how. When I cross swords with Fantagraphics people [most recently Eric Reynolds and Peter Bagge], we're very good-natured about ripping each other to shreds. I enjoy the hell out of it — I think they do, too.)**

(4) Then there's the conception of women as "Vampires of the Void" (I take that title not from your essay directly, but from an old space-opera comics story by Wally Wood; it too features an insatiable female vampire; if it were true that women were such — so what? They struggle for dominance; so do we. And do men not practice their own brand of vampirism? The Ted Bundys of history far outnumber the Elizabeth Bathories. There may even be cases of mutual vampirism, à la Lorena and John. Have certain women held back the course of civilization at times? Maybe. But so have a number of men - too many to be considered "exceptions." It wasn't women who burned the Library at Alexandria; it was Cheetah and Bonzo figuring out what to do with their spare time and testosterone (and in another sort of hunting party, I note).

But of late there has been some question on the anthropological front as to how true is the old picture of "Man made the world while women sat at home cooking." Some of this was started by Robert Graves' insights into women's role in religion (you say now "Women are not Muses," but there was a time when your Tarim/Terim schemata seemed positively Gravesian; maybe you intended that as a deception — I dunno). William Irwin Thompson and Dudley Young have been among the non-female observers to adduce some importance to the female role beyond sitting around coagulating, and some of the evidence strongly suggests that women invented such arts as weaving and agriculture, which, like most discoveries, probably would have begun as acts of imaginative speculation, being perfected by the trial and error of reason. Or, to put it another way, if Jesus of Nazareth (usually considered one of the Leading Lights in Western history) wanted to create the miracle of the loaves and fishes without any historical help from woman, he might've had to satisfy himself with just fishes, as possibly there would've been no loaves if some cavewoman, stuck at home with the kids, hadn't figured out how to bake them (the loaves, not the kids). **(Well, it's nice to hear *someone* acknowledge that women struggle for dominance and not just equality. I've already addressed the 'hunting-party' thing but I'll reiterate it here: was the motivation 'nationalism', the protection of home and hearth, bringing home the bacon to the 'wives and kids', or was it just the sheer pleasure of burning a library? As in point 2, whether we're talking about an actual motivation or a cover story, the net effect is the same, isn't it? The guys who stayed home and didn't participate probably weren't thought of as top-of-the-line husband-and-father material, were they? I think this is a foundation of civilisation — the reality beneath the cover story beneath the reality.**

A woman may have invented the wheel — what's your point? Going that far back and indulging in speculation about which gender invented or perfected what is almost too asinine to deserve a response. Let's confine ourselves to discussing acts of creative thinking where we know what was created by whom, shall we? Leave

Oog and Oogette for the brain-washing feminazis.)

Now — to segue to the essay's more positive qualities — this is one of the few instances of an intellectual manifesto in comics history, at least from a creator regularly involved in producing comics (which leaves out both Kenneth Smith and yours truly). There may have been other manifestos that I forget at the moment, but I stress the word "intellectual" when applying it to your own. In my purely private definition, an "intellectual" is not simply an intelligent person; the quality of intelligence is a prerequisite but not a defining characteristic, as the first bread-baker may have been intelligent but not necessarily an intellectual. To me an intellectual is an intelligent person *with a passion for the history of ideas*. This is not to say that every intellectual's version of that history will be like every other's, but there is at least an attempt to continually refine and improve one's vision of that history, rather than falling back on sops and whipping-boys ("Du-uuh, sup'heroes wear masks jus' like da KKK, so dey mus' be, whatchacallem, 'fascists.'"). I applaud you for attempting to place your perceptions in the context of the history of ideas, and your efforts to form a concept of morality that is not piously moralistic (according to the *Journal* ad, I see that you have joined the superheroes in the Halls of Fascism; such originality of thought fairly takes my breath away). A friend of mine disliked your essay because it was not journalistically concise; I believe that its ability to wander throughout different times, locales, and personas was more a strength than a weakness. I may not agree with many of your statements, but at least I don't get from your essay the impression that everything interesting was already thought, said or written during the '20s and '30s that comprise the heyday of American literary modernism.

There is one aspect of that period I would like to see more imitated by comics authors, though; one which *Booklist* writer Stuart Whitwell eulogized in a review of a Paglia book. (Some of the parallels between her thought and yours — and I'm presuming here, perhaps incorrectly, that you've not read her — are quite striking, given that she is more of the Romantic mold than the Cynical.) Whitwell saith: "...60 years ago, broad and sweeping ideas were thrown down like gauntlets before anyone who could read. And see, now, what we have in their place: narrow quarrels over definitions and procedure. In science, caution, emotional neutrality, and narrow focus are virtues. But in the humanities they are deadly." I believe that we need, perhaps in comics more than any other contemporary medium, those "broad, sweeping ideas"; we need to be taking risks rather than wondering if someone will call us fascists for Thinking the Wrong Thought.

In the same spirit of offering my thoughts as a contrast to (rather than a righteous condemnation of) your own, I beg to differ on the terms you use to elevate Eddie Campbell's *Bacchus* above the common ruck of the superhero. Dave, I've read a shitload of books on mythology — more than you want to hear cited, believe me — and while you might hear me discoursing at a con on the types of myth inherent in superhero stories (though I've not dressed in black since the fifth grade), there's no one who'd be happier than I to see a comic-book tale that realized some of the genuine complexity of archaic myth, rather than the fragmentary glimpses one gets in the superhero books. And I'll even admit that the current offerings at cons seem to comprise the worst aspects of the Golden Age — a huge panoply of mediocre, punch-happy clowns — with none of the best aspects: the more inventive, extravagant figures whose very extravagance gives them some connection with mythic status. But if you're touting *Bacchus* as being head and shoulders above even the best of the superheroes today, I say thee nay — at least in terms of mythological complexity. If one wanted to exalt it in terms of better style or more mature dialogue, I'd have no argument with that — but neither of those makes for better myth. It all depends on what view one holds of the gods, whom you claim *Bacchus* mirrors so much better. If one views them as a bunch of egotistical, immortal dickwads — a view for which Homer offers qualified support — then, sure, *Bacchus* is a good representation. But, then, so is the Perez *Wonder Woman*, with which one of Campbell's former editors (Dave Harwood of *Harrier*) compared *Bacchus*, calling the Perez godfest "static" beside *Bacchus*. There may be any number of ways in which the Campbell creation is more dynamic than the Perez version of WW, but if we're talking transformations of mythic material, nothing's inherently more dynamic about Campbell's Eyeball Kid, pissing in the air to duplicate Zeus' pluvian proclivities, than Perez' alteration of Paradise Island into an *axis mundi*, complete with Atlas to hold it up. In neither case are we talking about anything that could give good competition to the myth manipulations of Blake, Yeats, and Graves — who, as it happens, mirror and/or influence my own conception of the gods: not as just "people writ large" but as concatenations of countless historical, psychological, socio-logical and metaphysical associations that have been, or will be, important to humanity. Them's the gods I drink to, Dave, and they don't consider it a comedown to appear in mere "popular" literature. **(Never let it be said that Dave Sim declined an invitation to drink to another man's gods. Cheers, mate.)**

As I was ending this, I did get a copy of the *Journal* piece (courtesy of the friend who didn't like your essay, in fact). Some reactions:

(1) Much is made in the piece of the lack of response to your essay from the comics community, Seth going so far as to call that community "spineless." Yet he turns around and admits he didn't finish his long letter to you "because it was too much." Perhaps many people did not comment for this reason: it's a fucking lotta trouble to dissect an involved piece of writing like the One Eight Six *Reads*. It was a fucking lotta trouble for me to write this letter, and I suppose I did it for various reasons that many people don't have: certainly most of them don't have the motives the *Journal* has for taking the trouble (be they more moral or more financial. Thoth alone knows). **(Reacting to the threat to their idiosyncratic status quo [i.e., self-publishing developing a certain popularity], Gary definitely wanted no part of the *Spirits of Independence* events where creators, not publishers, exhibited. He saw 186 as a chance to make appearing at a *Spirits* stop an immoral act for a creator. The only Fantagraphics creator to exhibit to date is Roberta Gregory. She knows exactly who and what Gary is.)**

(2) And speaking of a lack of trouble I don't know how much blood Anne Rubenstein sweated over the finished product, or how much space the *Journal* allowed her, but it's a pretty skimpy rebuttal. At least when Gary Groth rakes you over the coals, he does so in detail. Rubenstein addresses little of what you said, though she does at least allude to the "biology is destiny" school of thought (the one that says men and women are essentially different), but misrepresents its proponents as universally claiming (or having the effect) that "women are other than fully human." Paglia, at least, represents the sexes as occupying different poles of potential human behavior by the fact of their bodily natures, though both sexes remain free to alter biological destiny by force of will. Colin Wilson - not among those she cites, understandably — asserts that there is a mental difference as well as a physical; that men are more far-sighted and more prone to ignore the close-up; women more near-sighted and prone to ignore the Big Picture. And though, as I said earlier, One Eight Six is not evenhanded on the matter of male failings, I believe your work had indeed been critical of same (if not in the same way as either Paglia or Wilson). All these ideas deserve discussion — or, at least, more discussion than Rubenstein chooses to give them. She might at least have explained why Shaw's ideas about the sexes are of greater significance than yours, as that might have made for some interesting intellectual by-play, but, no, all we get is the Bald Assertion That It Is So. **(I agree. There was a lot of potential for an interesting debate in a couple of her paragraphs. Debate wasn't the *Journal*'s motivation, in my view, so it's no wonder they botched the job so badly, [although] Kim Thompson, to his credit, took Hagey's incoherent first draught and made it better: not as good as it could have been, but better).**

(3) The argument is made (most vehemently by the NOW representative) that the thought behind the essay may be "dangerous" if misapplied. This is true. It is also true of every other idea; to date there has not been one idea, ideal, or ideology that human beings cannot fuck up. ("Comrade Bissette, you have been found guilty of having decadent tastes in literature, based on the testimony of Comrade Groth that you never met a slasher film you did not like.") Makes as much sense as Dave Sim in charge of a concentration camp for women. **(Let's leave the really easy targets alone. Just because the *Journal* made themselves ridiculous, I see no reason to muddy the debate on vital gender issues by acting wounded.)**

(4) The Dem interview: interesting from a historical point of view, but hardly criticism of your ideas as ideas. I do agree with Ms. Loubert that the old Lennon-was-ruined-by-Yoko line is pretty hoary, especially since I think that his unique creativity was most heightened by his "temporary merged permanence" with prime collaborator McCartney. That parting of the ways probably would've come to pass, Yoko or no Yoko, thus illustrating that some creators do their best work in collaboration and never rise to the same heights alone. Examples include Gilbert and Sullivan, Lucy and Desi, and (shitstorm incoming!) Simon / Kirby and Lee/Kirby. **(Just my opinion, but I think the John and Yoko thing evinces a decided lack of perspective [as does the Paul and Linda thing]. It isn't really a question, to me, of the inevitability of the Lennon-McCartney team splitting up — rather that the replacement 'teams' were so substandard. Seriously — how well-known and influential do you think Yoko would have been if she hadn't latched onto John? Why couldn't John see that Yoko did not become a brilliant and insightful artist, eclipsing the merit of the Beatles, just because he said so? I mean it's certainly cute in its own way — awww, they're in love and they're performing together. But I would defy anyone to demonstrate on any meaningful scale of creative perception how Elephants' Memory and Wings were a step up from The Beatles — except, perhaps, as a harbinger of the Women Must Be A Significant Half of Everything Regardless of Merit and Ability morass in which we find ourselves today.)**

In conclusion, let me add that you've not been alone in receiving criticism from me: late last year I sent a long letter to the *Journal* critiquing one of their op-ed pieces for inaccuracy. Many reasons there might be, but I think only one — complacence — accounts for its not being printed. Who watches the watchers, indeed. **(I really think that a tabloid television show ABOUT tabloid television shows would be really fucking cool. 'Tonight on TABLOID BEAT [boom boom]: He's the producer of A CURRENT AFFAIR, but now an affair from his past has got all of Hollywood asking, *Who was that transvestite*?')**

Gene Phillips
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(Hey! I kinda like this format — anyone else got a long letter I can infect?)

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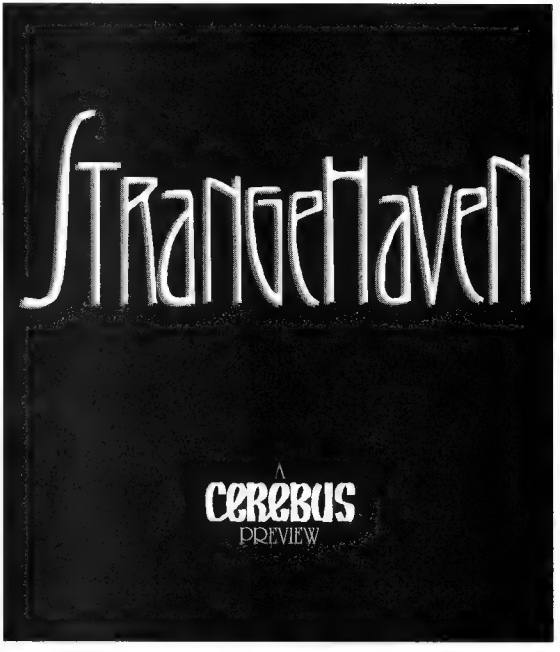

Gerhard insists that we both saw pages from *Strangehaven* on the 1993 Aardvarks over U.K. Tour. I can't say that it's familiar and I find it hard to believe that I would forget something this... well... *unforgettable*. The first issue arrived in the mail a couple of days ago and I really got a sense that something significant was breaking out of its shell. The product of Gary Spencer Millidge, it is the story of Alex Hunter losing his way on the country roads of Merry Olde and ending up in a small town called Strangehaven. The comparisons are made to *Twin Peaks* (never having seen *Twin Peaks*, I was reminded of Alan and Bill's *Big Numbers* myself) in the letters page where Millidge garners rave reviews on advance copies sent out to the likes of Alan Davis, Paul Grist and Phil Elliott. The local characters (and most of them *are* real characters) are well-rendered visually and verbally. Waiting to find out what happens next is going to be excruciating but, then, that's probably more than half of the fun of following a self-published title.

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1 in circles
STRANGE
GGBEER BISHOP
WHERE THE BLOODY HELL AM I NOW?
STRANGE-HAVEN?
STRANGEHAVEN
LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES.
CAN'T EVEN FIND "STRANGEHAVEN" ON THIS BLOODY MAP...

HEY! WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
SORRY LITTLE FELLA, YOU'LL HAVE TO GET OFF UNLESS YOU'RE COMING ALONG FOR THE RIDE.
I'LL HAVE TO SEE IF I CAN FIND A B&B.
WONDERFUL. NOW IT'S RAINING.

JESUS CHRIST!
SKWEEE

Yes, Let's see....
HELLO SON, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
UH... YEAH...
I THINK I'M SUPPOSED TO SAY "WHERE AM I?"
WELCOME BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING!
IT'S OKAY, TAKE IT EASY...
YOU'RE IN STRANGE-HAVEN. YOU WRAPPED YOUR CAR AROUND A TREE ABOUT HALF A MILE UP THE ROAD FROM HERE.

WHERE..? I COULDN'T FIND IT ON THE...
MAP WAS ALL WRONG...
IT WAS RAINING...
THE GIRL!
IS SHE ALRIGHT?
SLOW DOWN SON, SLOW DOWN..
NOW THEN, YOU SAY THERE WAS SOME-ONE ELSE INVOLVED IN THE ACCIDENT?
YES, YES... A GIRL, A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN, DRESSED IN BLACK
I JUST COULDN'T AVOID HER . I SKIDDED ... BUT SHE JUST... JUST STOOD THERE.
THERE WAS NO-ONE ELSE FOUND AT THE ACCIDENT. I WAS CALLED TO THE SCENE MYSELF. IT APPEARS THAT YOU SIMPLY MISJUDGED THE CORNER AND HIT A TREE.
HEY, YOU'VE HAD A BUMP ON THE HEAD, AND A NASTY SHOCK ... YOU MUST BE A LITTLE TIRED AND CONFUSED.
YES... TRY AND REST... NOW, I REALLY MUST GET BACK TO THE SURGERY.
JANEY HERE WILL LOOK AFTER YOU...
I'LL CALL BACK IN THE MORNING TO SEE HOW YOU'RE PROGRESSING.

WELL, I COULD DO WITH A NICE CUP OF TEA PLEASE, NURSE.
SORRY, NO CAFFEINE. BUT I'LL GET YOU A GLASS OF WATER IN A MINUTE.
AND I'M NOT A NURSE I'M JUST THE DOCTOR'S RECEPTIONIST REALLY.
THIS DOESN'T LOOK MUCH LIKE A HOSPITAL, EITHER...
NO, YOU'RE AT MRS McCREADIE'S B.&B AT THE TOP OF THE HIGH STREET. I'LL GET YOU THAT GLASS OF WATER AND YOU CAN GET SOME REST. SGT. CLARKE WANTS TO SPEAK TO YOU TOMORROW.
CROWS HOUSE
ACCOMMODATION BED & BREAKFAST
GOOD AFTERNOON... I'D JUST LIKE TO ASK YOU A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS, MR.. ER..
HUNTER: ALEXANDER HUNTER. FROM CANEWDON IN ESSEX...
ESSEX? CAN YOU TELL ME WHY YOU WERE TRAVELLING TO STRANGE-HAVEN, MR HUNTER?
I WASN'T.
I WAS DRIVING TO CORNWALL FOR AN EXTENDED HOLIDAY, TAKING IN SOME OF THE SIGHTS. I JUST GOT LOST AFTER DARK LAST NIGHT

AS I UNDERSTAND IT, YOU HAD TO SWERVE TO AVOID A WOMAN IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROAD...
NO! I HIT HER! MY BRAKES LOCKED. I SKIDDED AND DROVE STRAIGHT INTO HER! DOES EVERY-ONE THINK I'M MAKING IT UP?
OF COURSE NOT SIR BUT YOUR CAR AMS FOUND CRASHED INTO A LARGE TREE, AND THERE WAS NO SIGN OF ANYONE ELSE INVOLVED.
I DON'T THINK I REQUIRE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION, SIR.. ENJOY YOUR STAY.
THANKS A BUNCH.
OCH! IT'S ONLY ME! HOW'S THE PATIENT?
OH I'M...
YOU'RE A VERY LUCKY YOUNG MAN Y'KEN, VERY LUCKY INDEED. IS THERE ANY-THING I CAN GET YE? HOW LONG WILL YE BE STAYING ON?
MRS McCREADIE
YE DO HAVE CASH OR CREDIT CARD I TAKE IT.. NOT THAT I WOULD TURN YE AWAY, OCH, NO...
BUT I'VE HAD SUCH TROUBLE WITH MY TEETH, I HAD A WEE FILLING JUST DROP OUT TODAY... I HAD TO SUPERGLUE IT BACK IN...

CAN YE SEE IT?
ARE YOU SURE THAT'S WISE?
OCH, YE DINNA WORRY ABOUT ME LASSIE, I SAVED MYSELF A COUPLE OF BOB TOO, NO DOUBT.
BUT I CANNA STAND HERE GASSING ALL DAY, I'VE GOT WORK TO DO!
phew.
NOW, YOU REALLY OUGHT TO GET SOME SLEEP, MR HUNTER.
CALL ME ALEX...
OKAY; ALEX. AS SOON AS THE DOC GIVES YOU THE ALL-CLEAR TOMORROW, I'LL SHOW YOU THE VILLAGE, AND WE'LL SEE ABOUT YOUR CAR.
GREAT. SHE GOES ON A BIT DOESN'T SHE?
YES. NOW GO TO SLEEP.
OKAY. I'M TRYING.
WHAT'S THE SHOEBOX FOR?
I DON'T KNOW. I'LL BE HERE IF YOU NEED ANYTHING.
NOW GO TO SLEEP.
I SUPPOSE A GOODNIGHT KISS IS OUT OF THE QUESTION?
SLEEP.
CROW HOUSE

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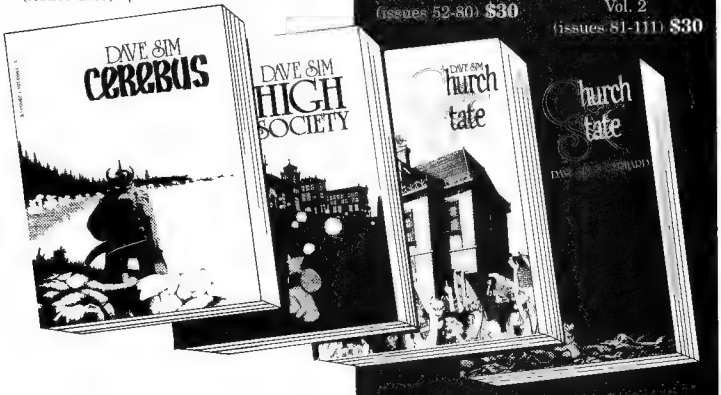

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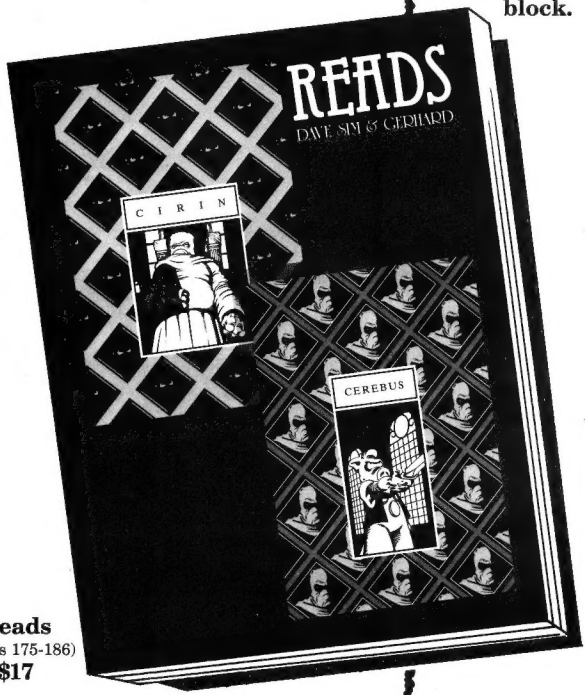

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